Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1.   (Currently Amended) A method for recognizing speech comprising:

performing a first comparison which ~~comparing~~ compares a ~~predetermined~~ ~~number of~~ spoken character string having an at least N number of characters to a ~~corresponding~~ set of pattern character strings stored in a memory and each of the pattern character strings, wherein the first comparison comprises:

selecting the N number of characters from the spoken character string;

comparing N times each character of the N number of characters to each pattern character string;

determining an exact match between one or more characters of the N number of characters and one or more characters of each of the pattern character strings; and

calculating a first match probability of each of the pattern character strings based on a number of hits that exactly matches one or more of the N number of characters of the spoken character string;

selecting a group of pattern character strings from the memory based on the ~~first comparison~~ first match probability;

performing a second comparison which compares ~~comparing a second~~ ~~predetermined~~ an M number of ~~spoken~~ characters of the spoken character string to ~~the~~ remaining ~~corresponding~~ characters in each of the selected group of pattern character strings; ~~and~~

calculating a second match probability of the each of the selected group of pattern character strings based on a total number of hits that exactly matches the one or more of the N number of characters and one or more of the M number of characters of the spoken character string; and

identifying a resultant pattern character string having a highest second match probability representative of a recognized ~~identifying the~~ spoken ~~characters~~ character string ~~based upon the second comparison~~.

2.   (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, where ~~the corresponding character string is stored in the memory according to a tree structure~~ calculating the first match probability comprises calculating the first match probability as a quotient from the number of hits in the first comparison.

3.   (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, where ~~the predetermined number of spoken characters is a portion of the total characters in a spoken character string~~ calculating the second match probability comprises calculating the second match probability as a quotient from the total number of hits in the second comparison.

4.   (Canceled)

5.   (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, where the second comparison further comprises comparing all of ~~the spoken~~ remaining characters of the spoken character string that are not compared during the first comparison to the remaining characters in the each of the selected group of pattern character strings.

6.   (Original) The method according to claim 1, where the second comparison compares more characters than the first comparison.

7.   (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, where the second comparison compares ~~additional~~ M characters in incremental steps.

8.   (Currently Amended) The method according to claim ~~1~~7, where ~~identifying further comprises recognizing a selected character string that has the highest probability of~~

~~identifying the spoken character string~~ the second match probability is always larger than the first match probability for the resultant pattern character string.

9-15. (Canceled)

16. (Currently Amended) A sound recognition system ~~for sound recognition~~ comprising:

   a microphone;

   a processor for digitizing sound signals received from the microphone;

   a memory coupled to the processor for storing pattern character strings;

   a comparator for comparing a sound character string formed from the sound signals to the ~~stored~~ pattern character strings ~~in the memory~~, during a first comparison, the comparator selecting an N number of characters from the sound character string and comparing the N number of characters to each of the pattern character strings N times, and during a second comparison, the comparator comparing remaining characters of the sound character string to remaining characters of the each pattern character string M times where the remaining characters of both the sound character string and the each pattern character string are not compared during the first comparison; and

   a controller ~~programmed to select a group of stored character strings based on a comparison of a predetermined number of characters of the sound character string to a predetermined number of stored characters and further programmed to identify a stored character string within the group of stored character strings that recognizes the sound character string~~ which takes a result of the first and the second comparisons from the comparator and calculates a first match probability based on the first comparison and a second match probability based on the first and the second comparisons, where the controller selects a group of pattern character strings based on the first match probability and identifies a resultant pattern character string that recognizes the sound character string based on the second match probability.

17.   (Currently Amended) A system according to claim 16, where ~~the stored character strings are stored in the memory according to a tree structure~~the controller calculates the first match probability and the second match probability based on a number of hits between one or more characters of the sound character string and one or more characters of the each pattern character string.

18.   (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 16, where the second comparison is performed by adding one or more of the remaining characters of the sound character string ~~the spoken characters are compared~~ in incremental steps.

19.   (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 16, where ~~the controller is further programmed to select by calculating a matching probability based on the comparison~~ the controller calculates the first match probability as a quotient from a number of hits in the first comparison.

20.   (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 16, where the controller is further ~~programmed to identify a stored character string within the group of stored character strings that has the highest probability of identifying the sound character string~~ calculates the second match probability as a quotient from a total number of hits in the second comparison.

21.   (New) A method for recognizing speech, comprising:
        providing an input of a spoken character string;
        performing a first comparison which compares the input of the spoken character string to a set of pattern character strings and reduces the set of pattern character strings to a group of qualifying pattern character strings having a match probability that exceeds a predetermined threshold where the first comparison comprises comparing a portion of the spoken character string with the portion of each of the pattern character

strings and determining a number of hits between the spoken character string and the each pattern character string; and

performing a second comparison which identifies a resultant pattern character string representative of a recognition of the spoken character string, where the second comparison comprises comparing a part of, or an entire remaining characters of the spoken character string to each pattern character string of the group of qualifying pattern character strings and determining a total number of hits between the spoken character string and one or more characters of the group of qualifying pattern character strings.

22. (New) The method according to claim 21, where the second comparison comprises adding the part of, or the entire remaining characters of the spoken character string all at once.

23. (New) The method according to claim 21, where the second comparison comprises adding the part of, or the entire remaining characters in incremental steps.

24. (New) The method according to claim 23, where the second comparison further comprises repeating the comparison between one or more characters of the spoken character string and the added character or characters.

25. (New) The method according to claim 21, where determining the number of hits comprises determining an exact match between one or more characters of the spoken character string and each of the pattern character strings of the set of pattern character strings.

26. (New) The method according to claim 21, where determining the total number of hits comprises determining an exact match between one or more characters of the

spoken character string and one or more characters of each of the pattern character strings of the qualifying pattern character strings.

27.   (New) The method according to claim 21, where the match probability of the resultant pattern character string during the second comparison is always larger than the match probability during the first comparison.